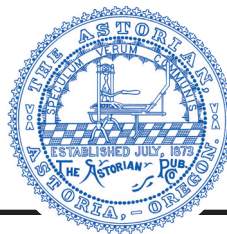


OPINION



the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Rooted in the work

The county fair is a walk through the culmination of thousands of hours of labor. It shows the time, money and love local youth spent on their animals. It is also a preview of the future faces of the region's agriculture community.

Growing up on the North Coast, I remember seeing friends at the fair proud of their livestock — the time they spent on them, the relationships they developed — but also bitter-sweet when it was time to say goodbye after the auction.



JONATHAN WILLIAMS

For centuries, the image of the farmer, alone, toiling in a field, herding cattle and tending to livestock with a pastoral sun ablaze above has dominated the cultural imagination.

Even now, you don't have to look far for scenes on the farm. Last year, a campaign video from President Joe Biden featured farmworkers set to an upbeat rendition of "America the Beautiful."

While the farmer remains a treasured national icon, small farmers need help. Some suffer from a lack of autonomy, barely break even and don't have a succession plan.

Author Grace Olmstead tackles that and more in her smart, compelling book, "Uprooted: Recovering the Legacy of the Places We've Left Behind."

While the North Coast has a stronger local food scene — farmers markets, direct-to-consumer sales and the new Astoria Food Hub — the question of keeping young people and attracting others who've gone away is just as present here.

Rootedness, what keeps some firmly in place and drives others to seek new opportunities, is the main focus of Olmstead's book.

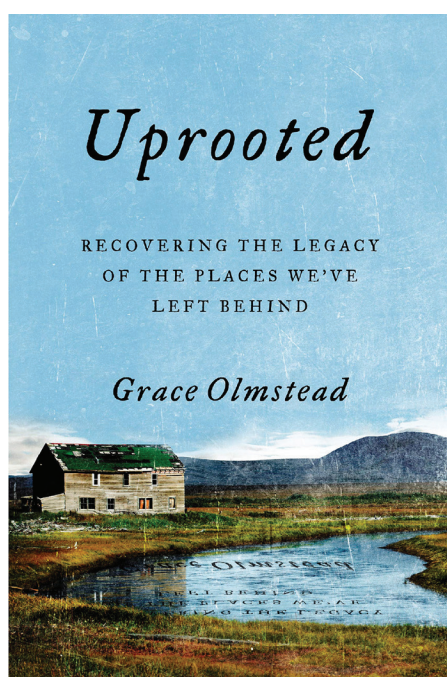
Set in the author's hometown of Emmett, Idaho, a small town near Boise, Olmstead takes readers through the farming town's boom and bust. She probes for answers to fix it, along the way telling the tale of farming's decline in America and the emptying out of rural spaces.

Olmstead, who now works as a journalist and lives in Virginia, grew up in a family that devoted their life's labor to the land. But things aren't the same in Emmett. The roots that once held everything together aren't as strong. Many



Madi Olson hugs her sheep, 'Karen,' goodbye at the end of last year's auction at the Clatsop County Fair.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian



'Uprooted: Recovering the Legacy of the Places We've Left Behind,' by Grace Olmstead.

who were raised there choose not to stay after graduating high school, and for those that do, farming isn't as lucrative a career as it once was.

Olmstead is frank in admitting that nationally, not all believe small towns matter.

Today, less than 2% of Americans work on farms. A report from Boise State University estimated Treasure Valley, where Emmett is located, could lose between 59% and 64% of its farmland by 2100.

Through interviews and reporting,

WHILE NOT EVERYONE WANTS TO FARM, STRENGTHENING TIES IN THE AGRICULTURE COMMUNITY PROVIDES, AS OLMSTEAD MAKES CLEAR, A CONTINUED FUTURE FOR LOCAL FOOD.

Olmstead shows the grit needed for farming. She writes of a family whose "dream required nursing sick cows and birthing calves in the middle of the night, tending crops in the sweltering summer heat, scrimping and saving every penny in order to keep the farm alive."

It isn't hard to see why so many families struggle with succession. And with that lack of planning comes a loss of knowledge in how to work with the land.

A farming counterculture is emerging, though. Organic farming, people rehabbing the land and creating community direct-to-consumer sales are reimagining what farming can be.

A need for creativity in solving farming's myriad problems is clear.

Olmstead traces farming's decline to the post-World War II pressures on farmers to mass produce in order to feed the world and the 1970s culture of getting big or getting out. She notes how rural towns are having their worth determined by corporations, leaving farmers barely breaking even and isolating them from their community.

While Idaho's small farms have suffered, the state has grown. Olmstead writes that some state officials believe the population could increase

by 200,000 residents by 2026. And with that has come suburban sprawl, pushing farmers off the land.

Olmstead offers some solutions. She argues that a new system should come about that allows farmers to fight monopolies and strengthens their community ties.

Farmers have a close kinship with the land. They are more in tune to it. They watch it change. Olmstead argues that for areas to thrive again and succession plans to work, farmers should have closer ties to young people.

But young people don't just want a job; they want a community. Through local boards and societies, Olmstead argues, they can avoid the isolation that plagues too many farmers.

As the Class of 2034 enters kindergarten this fall, what will the agriculture opportunities be on the North Coast when they graduate?

The coast is a truly beautiful place to live. But that alone won't keep young people here.

While not everyone wants to farm, strengthening ties in the agriculture community provides, as Olmstead makes clear, a continued future for local food.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of *The Astorian*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Out of character

I was born in Astoria, and I am a proud graduate of Astoria High School. After I moved away, I served on the Friends of the Astoria Column board for many years, raising awareness and money to restore an important piece of Astoria and Oregon's history.

The support from local government and caring local individuals showed the beautiful heart of the community, and how important Astoria's character is to all who love the town.

That's why I'm struggling to understand why the city is considering allowing a building to be constructed that is out of character with Astoria's authentic and classic Uppertown neighborhood.

The building's size would dwarf the buildings around it, and not fit in architecturally. One of those buildings is the U.S. Custom House, which is an ode to Astoria's historic role as a U.S. port of entry for goods reaching the West Coast.

It would block the Columbia River view of a beloved lifelong Astoria citizen, Vincent Tadei. It would affect access to his home, his driveway and put his and other nearby property owners at risk of landslides.

I'm grateful for the forethought of Astoria's city leaders in crafting the city's comprehensive plan, which identifies the Uppertown neighborhood as one with "a stable neighborhood character."

It also states: "The predominant residential character of the area upland of Marine Drive/Lief Erikson Drive will be preserved." If the city follows its own plan, this building should not be allowed to move forward.

GAIL DUNDAS
Gearhart

Inconvenience

There are sections of towns along U.S. Highway 101 Business. The public service buses used to run over this route, and still do, if the New Youngs Bay Bridge is impassable for any reason.

Now the paratransit buses do not service this area, almost surrounded by bus routes, because Highway 101 Business is not a bus route.

While this condition sometimes inconveniences me, one way or another, I think it is disastrous to taxpaying businessmen who have located their businesses in this area or, more likely, they were located there before the New Youngs Bay Bridge went in.

Competing businesses have opened up in more favorite areas, exacerbating the problem. Also, I'm wondering if any of the residents of this neglected area, who might otherwise qualify for this service, are being denied.

Most of these competing businesses have located in areas that were wetlands when I got here 20-some years ago. I was a wetland specialist before I retired, so I know these areas were wetlands, from my car as I drove by.

Standing water 11 to 12 months of the year is usually enough to indicate a wetland. I also know it is easy and profitable to influence a wetland specialist to certify that a wetland is not a wetland.

BENJAMIN A. GREAVES
Seaside

Justify

The letter "Excited," which ran July 6, seems to attempt to justify deacon Lewis Nimmo's feelings of excitement



at the prospect of his church's impending plans to construct a multipurpose building within a historical district in an Uppertown neighborhood.

While good intentions and elated feelings may be considered sufficient rationale to build a structure that will not only change the landscape, but have a significant impact on the people and surrounding neighborhoods, we feel the need to ask for a more comprehensive, well-thought out plan before proceeding further.

Are you aware that the structure you are so in favor of building is facing considerable opposition by members of the community, who would be significantly impacted by its presence? Are you aware that this opposition is being voiced by your neighbors?

Are you concerned about your neighbors' feelings and views ("And who is my neighbor?" Luke 10:25-37)? Are you prepared to push through with your proposed plans, in spite of this opposition?

Has this proposal been adopted by the congregation you represent? Do they share your enthusiasm? Have you asked them?

Going forward, we would ask that you consider the needs and desires of not only the community and members of Bethany Lutheran Church, who you so enthusiastically strive to serve, but the neighbor next door, who may also be in need of decision-making that is based on soundness, consensus and compassion, and that reflects the good intentions of all members.

TRICIA FRISK
Snow Camp, North Carolina